

Justice Department Obtains \$110,000 Settlement in Discrimination Lawsuit Against Apartment Complex Near Seattle

The owners and operators of Summerhill Place Apartments, a 268 apartment complex in Renton, Wash., have agreed to pay \$110,000 in damages and civil penalties to settle a lawsuit alleging that the complex had discriminated against African-Americans, Hispanic Americans, Indian Americans and families with children in violation of the Fair Housing Act, the Justice Department announced today. The settlement must still be approved by the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington.

“Working families already face enough challenges finding affordable housing,” said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. “Unlawful discrimination because of their race, their national origin, or because they have children, should not be one of them.”

“I am pleased that this settlement will both assist those who were discriminated against, and ensure rights are protected going forward,” said U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Washington Jenny A. Durkan. “The fair housing training for Summerhill’s employees and the plan to provide a recreation area for all the tenants, including children, will provide a brighter future for all prospective residents.”

The lawsuit, filed on July 16, 2010, named as Summerhill Place LLC (the owner of Summerhill Place Apartments), Gran Inc. (the management company) and Rita Lovejoy (the former on site manager). Lovejoy is no longer employed by the other defendants. The suit alleged, among other things, that defendants steered Indian tenants away from one of the five buildings at Summerhill, treated tenants from India less favorably than other tenants and discouraged African-Americans, Hispanics and families with children from living at Summerhill. The suit arose after the Fair Housing Council of Washington conducted testing at Summerhill, and the results of that testing were reported to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). After an investigation, the secretary of HUD determined that there was reasonable cause to believe that discriminatory housing practices had occurred, issued a charge of discrimination, and referred the matter to the Department of Justice.

“HUD has the authority to bring cases under the Fair Housing Act based on any credible evidence that discrimination is occurring at a housing development, even if no specific individual steps forward to file a formal complaint,” said John Trasviña, HUD’s Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity. “Whenever HUD discovers that a housing provider is turning away potential tenants or mistreating current residents because of their race, ethnicity, or family composition, HUD will vigorously enforce the Fair Housing Act.”

Under the terms of the settlement, the defendants will:

- Pay \$85,000 to tenants and prospective tenants who were harmed by the discriminatory practices alleged in the lawsuit;
- Pay \$25,000 to the government as a civil penalty;
- Maintain a common recreational area for all their tenants, including children;
- Provide fair housing training to their employees; and
- Develop and maintain non-discrimination policies at Summerhill.

Individuals who are entitled to share in the settlement fund will be identified through a process established in the settlement. Persons who believe they were subjected to unlawful discrimination at Summerhill should contact the Justice Department toll-free at 1-800-896-7743 mailbox # 9997 or e-mail the Justice Department at fairhousing@usdoj.gov .

Fighting illegal discrimination in housing is a top priority of the Justice Department. The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in housing on the basis of race, color, religion, sex familial status, national origin and disability. More information about the Civil Rights Division and the laws it enforces is available at www.justice.gov/crt. Individuals who believe that they have been victims of housing discrimination can call the Housing Discrimination Tip Line at 1-800-896-7743, e-mail the Justice Department at fairhousing@usdoj.gov or contact HUD at 1-800-669-9777.

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